

VIDEO AND NEW YORK STATE LIBRARIES

Public libraries are community cultural/educational institutions and information centers dedicated to retrieving and disseminating print and non-print materials to meet the needs and demands of the individuals and groups that comprise their public. Since 1970, various public libraries in New York State have been experimenting with the myriad possibilities of expanding services to the public through the videosphere. Libraries lend 1/2-inch portapak; conduct teen-age video workshops; produce cable TV programming; videotape local current events, controversial issues, community sports events, theater productions, oral/visual history with senior citizens; offer arts, entertainment, and educational programming on 3/4-inch cassettes; or just have a color TV available for people to watch programs.

Without special funding programs acting as catalysts, public libraries in New York would never have been able to join the video world. Initial funds for technical assistance, equipment, production, distribution and purchase of videotapes have been provided through the Federal Library Construction and Services Act (FLSCA), the New York State Council on the Arts, the Adult Independent Learner Program, Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), Friends of the Library, local businesses and institutions, and anonymous donors.

Will videotapes at the library become as popular a form and source of information, entertainment and cultural enrichment as books? That depends on many factors, nationwide, especially the awaited videodisc revolution. But meanwhile, let's take a look at some of the video-library developments in New York State.

"Video in the libraries is almost like the Arts . . . something gets going usually where the grants are provided."

Mike Miller,
Film Coordinator, Mid-Hudson Library system

THE MID-HUDSON LIBRARY SYSTEM

How are we going to use this? Will it be successful? How will we know? These are just some of the questions librarians are faced with when introducing new materials to their public. The Mid-Hudson Library System is about to open up a collection of independent videotapes to its 64 member libraries (in the five counties of Putnam, Dutchess, Green, Columbia and most of Ulster), covering 3,000 square miles. They have about 50 video-cassettes, some from the NYSCA distribution program (selected from projects they have funded) and others bought with a grant from the Council to purchase from other independently produced New York State artists.

Mike Miller had some help in selecting the tapes from Parry Teasdale of Media Bus who is familiar with video artists. The communities and degree of sophistication vary greatly (from farmland to suburban New York City) and Miller does not know what reaction to expect, although his experience with experimental films suggests a lot of people may not understand what's going on . . . and may complain. "I feel a responsibility to try and raise the general public's consciousness—make them aware at least of what is around—and we will be doing that with this collection of videotapes."

What does he think about independent video? "There's enough being done to be useful in a library atmosphere . . . like *Women of Northside Fight Back* and *Always Love Your Man*, which can fit into a wide range of audiences. But more experimental things like Peter Campus' work on Media Bus' *Video Games* are not what people are used to seeing. It's a struggle to try and familiarize them with the art-form end of it. If they like one or two tapes, they'll put on another and before you know it their visual literacy is going up and up."

How will the collection circulate? The plan is to send one of the library system's two 3/4-inch JVC play-

back decks and color monitor and all the tapes to one library for a three-month period. Miller will train the library staff or volunteers in the use of the equipment and the whole package will be available for individual or group showings. An annotated catalog is being printed and sent to all community groups who might use it. The Library's only restriction is not to loan to schools since they are notorious for duplicating tapes.

"Will videotapes at the library become as popular a form and source of information, entertainment, and cultural enrichment as books?"

Another project the Mid-Hudson Library System is sponsoring, again with a grant from NYSCA, is the Hudson Valley Film & Video Festival, a non-competitive event to spotlight independent artists in the area. They plan to screen the tapes via cable TV systems the week prior to the festival weekend since the medium is more suited to a mass audience in small groups.

ALBANY PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Public access programming is just another kind of information retrieval system. Although the information is not stored in the library, it comes from the library and it's the library's job to make information available—whether it be interviewing a congressman or doing a story hour, it's the same sort of stuff that's already in libraries. It's a way of hitting a mass audience."

Bob Katz, Media Librarian, Albany

The Albany Public Library is the central library of the Upper Hudson Library Federation System of 25 libraries. APL may be one of the first in New York State to house and be the delivery point for a live public access studio facility. By the time you read this they should be cablecasting from their new library to the 25,000 cable subscribers in Albany and nearby counties.

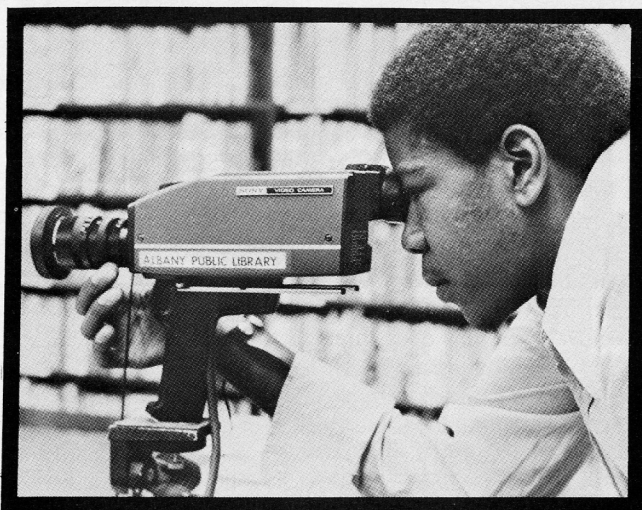
When I spoke with APL's Media Librarian Bob Katz last August, there were still many administrative details to be worked out and potential problems anticipated. Katz doesn't want total administrative control of the channel in the library, but he does want authority over who uses the library's equipment. He still sees the very active Albany Community Video Project (ACVP), a local access group that has been running the channel, producing 90 percent of the programming, but using the library's facilities.

The library's video equipment has been acquired

gradually since 1970 when their first portapak, purchased through LSCA, was used for summer film/video workshops to bring "disadvantaged" kids into the library. They have continued to receive support for year-round workshops from NYSCA, but the library has yet to build up its own budget to take over video/access maintenance and/or programming costs, except for salaries. In order to have some money to fall back on, Katz is thinking of charging a token sum for the use of the library studio. It's a novel idea, but does threaten to make access prohibitive to some people if the rates increase. Katz wouldn't mind if he could get "rid of some of the bad programming" and the "all night people who come on and just play records." This poses the problem of whether (and how) a librarian should decide what programming is cabled, if the library is responsible for operating the public access channel. Right now, the library itself is not programming too much on cable. Occasionally they will produce a children's drama workshop, tape a holiday parade or do a roving camera report on current events for immediate playback on the channel. They would like to tape visiting artists and writers at the library, do more children's programs, and get the nearby senior citizen home involved in programming. "It would be a natural place for them to come—depending on their needs—maybe some just need to keep occupied for an hour, maybe some would like to learn a skill or a hobby . . ." The ideas are there—all they need is money to implement them. There's enough good programming around for the channel right now without the library producing, especially with video artists like Tom DeWitt working with the ACVP and encouraging people to use the medium.

Other problems include staffing the library after normal hours. Right now the regular staff doesn't like or understand much of what it has seen on public access. "There is some junk, but there's a lot of good stuff too . . . There's a need to keep the channel lit up so that people will turn it on and see something there." Another more serious problem is what happens when "questionable" programming comes out of the library. "How do you deal with someone who wants to donate money to the library when they see something they think is obscene or they don't like and we say, 'That's our obligation to the public to put that on, . . . The FCC law says you have to do it and we're the only access point . . .'" The library is definitely in a politically sensitive position here because its economic base can be threatened.

The LSCA-funded Adult Independent Learner Project is also widening the library's videosphere; two 3/4-inch U cassette playback/record units will be available in carrels for screening of preproduced purchased programming. Two more units will be available for programming these tapes over the cable. Katz does not want to get too involved with the "traditional" library service approach for fear the Library will take over. "The Library should be there to facilitate the community's needs and desires, not its own." However, he would be interested in develop-



Leslie Slaughter, having completed the video training course for teenagers, assists at library productions at the New Scotland Branch of the Albany Public Library.

ing a video-reference component to program specific times when people could call up for visual information such as maps. This might be especially good for senior citizens unable to get to the Library. They've loaned equipment periodically to community groups but need money for more portapak's to do it regularly. Katz does not think the Library should be the only community access facility.

How will the library know what the public access viewers want/need/desire? The Library has hired two CETA workers through the Albany Department of Human Development to specifically research cable and public access. A telephone survey will help to assess what programming viewers like, dislike or don't want, and what level of professionalism is expected. They are also researching funding sources and canvassing other libraries with cable projects to decide how APL can further its existence as a community information center and meet people's needs by using public access.

CHAUTAUQUA-CATTARAUGUS LIBRARY SYSTEM

"There are not that many diversified institutions dealing with culture here so libraries play a more significant role vis-à-vis the general level of culture than they would in a larger city. Libraries should let others 'Do TV' and work cooperatively with them."

Howard Gutstadt, Survival Arts Media

"I took a short course in videotape production because at the time I believed everything I heard about video and I thought I better get a course in this thing before it gets charging up the road while I'm completely unprepared."

Jean Haynes, Film Librarian, Chautauqua Cattaraugus Library System

Expertise in videotape production does not develop overnight, even though 1/2-inch portapak equipment is relatively easy to handle. How does a library meet its expectations for excellence in community video production and programming while still learning video skills? The Chautauqua-Cattaraugus Library System in Jamestown, New York has found a solution in the nurturing of a cooperative and productive relationship with two NYSCA artists-in-residence: Howard Gutstadt and Mollie Hughes of Survival Arts Media. Expatriates of New York City, SAM arrived in Jamestown in early summer, 1975 and presented some of their tapes in the Art Gallery at the James Prendergast Library. They discussed their ideas for expanding local video productions with the county library system: 1) extending their sophisticated video skills to and through the library; 2) having a visiting artists program to legitimize creative visual arts in the area; and 3) producing local arts programming of interest to both counties. Prior to their arrival, Jean Haynes had purchased a portapak unit (8400) under the guidelines of the Adult Independent Learner Program to develop training workshops and role-playing sessions for the library staff. Community programming was not emphasized, but the Library did loan equipment to organizations and agencies such as New Economic Process and Manpower for their training workshops. SAM revived "community" enthusiasm that summer by providing workshops for library staff members which resulted in numerous single camera, unedited productions (story hours, craft fairs and a rodeo). While these tapes provide exciting feedback to the community, they are not well planned, according to Gutstadt, because library people underestimate the time commitment involved in producing a well-planned videotape. As a result, SAM has arranged with the Library System to provide post-production assistance (using its own and the library's 8650 editing decks) for any person associated through a library, producing a library program.

Ms. Haynes has made time available for her staff to learn video production seriously; Ann Garfinkle goes to the SAM studio two mornings a week to develop editing skills. Howie hopes to train library people to the point where they will have enough expertise to, in turn, train other staff members and volunteers.

In the meantime, the Library System has taken on a new role as cooperative producer with SAM and the Lake Shore Association for the Arts, Inc. for a series of videotapes concerning the lifestyles and work of Chautauqua/Cattaraugus County area creative people entitled, *"The Artists and Craftsmen Anthology."* Their first tape, *Dennis Dorogi, Dulcimer Maker* (shown last summer at the American Library Association Convention) is a pleasant trip through the process of one creative worker's efforts. These video productions will comprise a growing collection of television programs which would be available for viewing within the library system and potentially on cable and BOCES broadcast systems serving the two-county area. The

BOCES system of transmitting towers is the most important distribution system around there; it enables more rural communities to receive educational programming feeds from major city sources, going directly into schools and homes over UHF channels.

The "Anthology" is an initial effort to build a cooperative relationship between all the arts organizations and institutions with television production and distribution capability. "When you're working with systems or institutions," says Gutsadt, "you have to develop mechanisms that are meaningful for them to work with, like training staff on different levels. It takes two to three years to develop any kind of meaningful interactions, to create a willingness for everyone to work together" on production, programming and distribution efforts.

In addition to video workshops and productions, SAM and the Library also co-sponsored a short visiting artist series designed to open up the community to the variety of areas in which visual artists are creating. The series, funded by a technical assistance grant from NYSCA, was designed to begin at the "simple-structured TV idea like Lanesville Community TV" and progressing to more sophisticated technologies like Walter Wright's Computer Graphics. Other participating artists were Bill Jungles (film, video & photography); Ralph Jones (sound synthesis & video); Jane Aaron (animated film); Ernest Gusella (performance video); and Carl Geiger (video and computer systems). Nancy Cain and Bart Friedman of Media Bus, Lanesville, also participated in a discussion with library staff, BOCES and area cable stations about the possibilities of running a local community TV channel in the two counties. Gutstadt said, "There's value in encouraging this exposure [of artists] through the library system, and beyond—through BOCES—to reach more people."

What direction will they seek in the future? They would like to expand the visiting artist series to spot-

light an artist-a-month for more in-depth exposure to the community, and to develop a video-cassette library and video gallery. Perhaps they can interest the county-wide arts council in promoting a Film and Video Festival, "once there is a local television station and the possibility of broadcasting our own and other local work." It seems that for this corner of New York State, cooperation is definitely the key for the growth of video in the library world.

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY (The Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island)

The New York Public Library as a whole has been supportive of video-library activity. Many branches were beginning to experiment with community video (1/2-inch portapak production) but the budget crisis of the last few years limited their potential. Most recently I helped produce and edit an 11-minute documentary of a three-hour rally last June to save the library branches from closing down.

Donnell Library: An innovative project experimenting with how the public wants to use videotapes is beginning at the Donnell. The Film/Video Study Center, given a boost by NYSCA, includes: three study carrels, two 3/4-inch video-cassette recorders and color monitors, a selection of video art (from NYSCA) and other informational tapes. It is open to the public on a scheduled screening basis. According to Bill Sloan, Film Librarian, they are "looking for ideas that lend to individual education" (social services, women's rights, etc.), rather than to mass audience appeal. With a total materials budget of \$8,000, Bill Sloan and Mary Feldstein, Film/Video Historian, have begun building the collection and will then proceed to build an audience.

"Librarians lack direction in how to use video and don't know how the public will want to use it," said Sloan. This project will afford an opportunity for both the staff and public to explore possibilities. In the fall, Ms. Feldstein is arranging a videomakers discussion program to introduce the collection.

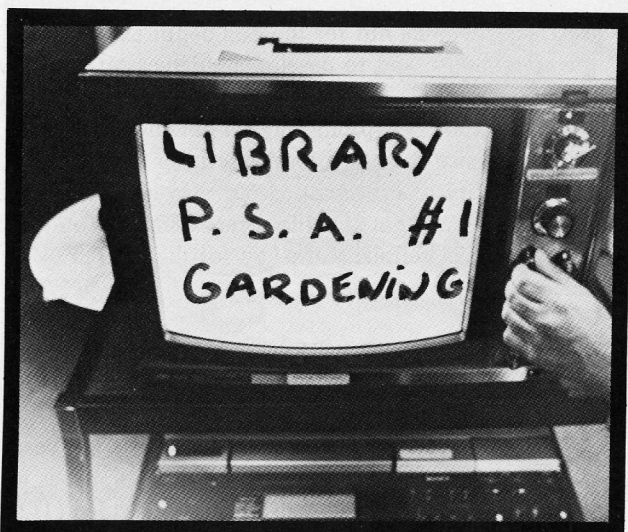
The Department of Special Services, headed by Ms. Lillian Lopez, has had portable 1/2-inch equipment since 1970 (LSCA) and has run teen-age video workshops in the South Bronx, Central Harlem, Staten Island, and Lower East Side projects. These workshops introduce young people to different facets of libraries and media and give them some skills in the process. Participants have taken more advanced courses with Young Filmmakers. This summer one Staten Island group wrote and produced a "Bicentennial Soap Opera". Projects have also responded to community group requests for taping ethnic events and special programs like drug discussions.

Both the theater and dance collections at the *Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts* have 3/4-inch viewing facilities. The Dance Research Center



Carol Anshein

Jean Haynes, film librarian for the Chautauqua-Cattaraugus Library.



has 1/2-inch to 2-inch tapes deposited by well-known choreographers and videomakers but viewing permission must be obtained from the choreographers. The Theater on Film and Tape Collection, partially supported by the NEA, has over 50 tapes of Broadway, Off- and Off-Off Broadway productions.

Jefferson Market Branch in Greenwich Village has viewing facilities for the public, including cable TV, and 1/2-inch and 3/4-inch decks for screening by the community. It is also a depository for community tapes and will supply facilities for transfer from 1/2-inch to 3/4-inch to groups and individuals who would like the library to have copies of their work.

While more libraries around the State are investing in video equipment, either 1/2-inch or 3/4-inch or both, there is yet no overall statewide video development policy other than the general attitude that libraries keep pace technologically with the needs and interests of their community.

Last spring, Governor Carey appointed a panel of library, education, community, arts, business and government people to develop an agenda of major issues for a conference next year on the future of libraries in the coming decade. One would hope that video in libraries, in all its forms—tapes, portable equipment, co-production, and TV access—would be encouraged and supported at the State level, beyond training tapes for staff, since television is a major influential part of the cultural, social, educational and historical fabric of our lives.

ADDENDUM

Other Library Systems using video and/or cable access:

Amherst Public Library
Binghamton Public Library

Brooklyn Public Library
Buffalo and Erie County Public Library
Four County Library System
Huntington Public Library (Suffolk County)
Nassau County Library System
Onandaga County Public Library (Syracuse)
Port Washington Public Library
Queensborough Public Library (New York City)
Rochester Public Library (Monroe County)
Tompkins County Public Library
Troy Public Library (Upper Hudson Library Federation)
Yonkers Public Library (Westchester County System)

Other Contacts

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99 Washington Avenue
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60 East 42nd Street
New York, New York 10017

Ms. Leslie Burke
Video and Cable Communications Section (VCCS)
Information Science and Automation Division
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Ocean County Library
Toms River, New Jersey 08753

Ms. Linda Hillman, Ass't Dir.
South Central Research Library Council (SCRLC)
Sheldon Court
College Avenue
Ithaca, New York 14850

Suggested Reading:

CableLibraries, C. S. Tepfer Publishing Co., Inc.
607 Main Street, Ridgefield, Connecticut 06877,
\$15./yr.

Forecast, Baker and Taylor, 1515 Broadway, New York, New York 10036, \$5./yr.
especially: "Libraries Going Video Active", Emma Cohn, October 1975; "The Library as a Community Resource", *Forecast Interview*, The Port Washington Public Library, Aug/Sept. 1975.

"Carey Appoints a Library Panel", *New York Times*, April 25, 1976, p. 63.

Video Resources In New York State, Film and Video Bureau, 250 West 57th Street, New York, New York \$3.00 ea. ■ ■ ■